



# LUIS G. FORTUÑO

RESIDENT COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE NEWSLETTER



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## Successful Workshop for Non Profit Organizations

### Director of the White House Community and Faith Based Initiatives Office visits Puerto Rico

With the goal of helping non-profit organizations in our community reach self-sufficiency, the Office of the Resident Commissioner held a workshop where more than 400 representatives from community and faith based organizations participated to "transform our society from bottom to top". The workshop, held at the Yolanda Guerrero Cultural Center in Guaynabo, featured a presentation by Jay Hein, director of the White House Community and Faith based Initiatives Office, who for the first time visited Puerto Rico to talk about federal fund opportunities for non-profit organizations.

"Our goal is to direct you towards economic development and the creation of strategic partnerships with the public and private sectors to join resources and obtain better results," Fortuño told the crowd, which included representatives from churches and congregations, municipalities and mayors, elderly homes and shelters for singles mothers, battered children and homeless.

Mr. Hein took the opportunity to present the "Presi-



Resident Commissioner, Luis Fortuño, visited the non-profit organization "La Fondita de Jesús", to share time with the program's participants and promote the importance of social work.

dential Volunteer Service Award" to Dr. Juan Panelli from Ponce. This recognition is granted by the President to people, who volunteer more than 4,000 hours of their time to social work. As a dentist Dr. Panelli has done missionary work in the Caribbean and South America. In Puerto Rico, he founded 'Proyecto Amor Que Sana, Inc.' to offer health services to home-

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## Productive Legislative Agenda

Fortuño's work in Congress during the past three years has brought benefits for all Puerto Ricans

### ✓ ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Approval of federal incentives for subsidiaries of stateside manufacturing companies doing business in Puerto Rico. This is the first time in 30 years that Congress approves an incentives measure for the Island's economic development.
- Extension of the rum tax, which generates \$85 million in revenues to the local government.

### ✓ TRANSPORTATION

- \$835 million in federal funds to build new roads and improve existing ones including among others PR-10, PR-52, the ferry system between Vieques and Culebra and the AMA buses.

### ✓ QUALITY OF LIFE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- More than \$100 in federal funds for flood control

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## FROM WASHINGTON

Let me take this opportunity to pledge I will continue working in Congress to bring back to Puerto Rico the right to dream with a prosperous and peaceful future. As citizens we are all conscious of the serious problems affecting our society. Everyday the media shows images of battered women and children, neglected communities and crimes committed by teenagers who have abandoned their homes. Everyday we see in our streets people that are homeless, addicted to drugs or sick begging for money to survive the night.

As a result, I question myself, if there is a solution to these problems, if there is a possibility for a better tomorrow. The solution is in the more than 4,000 non-profit community and faith-based organizations in Puerto Rico dedicating their services to transform our society from the bottom to the top. These organization, churches, congregations and community groups need resources to continue working and together, give back to our children and grandchildren the power of dreaming.

During my time in Congress I have focused in giving community and faith based organizations more resources to continue their social work. My initiatives with community and faith based organizations have promoted the opening of 48 municipal offices in Puerto Rico to help non-profit organizations, community groups and churches get the resources they need to build a better Puerto Rico for all of us.

Wishing you health and happiness in the coming year,

*Luis Fortuño*

## 2B HEALTH

### Fortuño Looks After The Rights of HIV/AIDS Patients in P.R.

With the goal improving the services to HIV/AIDS patients on the Island, the Resident Commissioner submitted legislation that would give access to adequate health care services and medicines to more patients in Puerto Rico.

The bill, which has the support of Nydia Velázquez (NY), José Serrano (NY) and Hilda Solís (CA), aims to ease the financial crisis that community organizations servicing HIV/AIDS patients are currently facing, by allowing them to apply for federal funds directly, instead of having to go through a municipal or state government. The bill proposes:

- Improved access to funds from government agencies and community organizations to take care of the high volume of patients currently without service.
- Faster and additional services.
- Eliminate the maximum fund limit for HIV/AIDS under the Medicare program.
- Assign \$50 million to create a pilot program to entice community and faith-based organizations to provide services in high risk communities.

### FORTUÑO TAKES CARE OF THE HEALTH OF 100,000 CHILDREN

In addition, Fortuño got Congress to approve a millionaire increase in the federal funds assigned to Puerto Rico under the S-CHIP health insurance program for children. The increase would at least

duplicate the funds that the Island currently receives and would benefit more than 100,000 children.

Under the new law, S-CHIP funds assigned to Puerto Rico would be equal to the highest amount received under the program between 1998 and 2007. That amount would be multiplied by a formula to calculate annual increases. The highest amount received under SCHIP was in 1999 when it reached \$66.2 million.



Resident Commissioner, Luis Fortuño, is joined by members of AARP in Puerto Rico to announce the presentation of a bill in Congress to improve access to Medicare benefits in Puerto Rico.

### Bill Would Improve Medicare Benefits

More than 600,000 seniors in Puerto Rico could enjoy better Medicare services once Congress approves bill, HR 2789, submitted by the Resident Commissioner. The legislation would extend to Medicare beneficiaries living in Puerto Rico the advantage of automatic enrollment in Medicare Part B at age 65.

Fortuño explained that Puerto Rico is the only jurisdiction where Medicare beneficiaries are not automatically enrolled in Part B, which covers medical and laboratory services. At present, people have to visit a Social Security Office to request the benefits. This bill has the support of the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP).





## 3A VETERANS

# New Veterans Hospital Possible in the Near Future



Resident Commissioner, Luis Fortuño, holds a meeting with leaders and representatives of 11 veteran organizations in Puerto Rico to discuss a report published by the Department of Veterans Affairs on the construction of a new Hospital and the alternatives to replace the existing one.

In June, the Department of Veterans Affairs issued a report detailing various alternatives to replace the existing Veterans Hospital. The report comes as a result of a request made by Congress asking for an evaluation of the different options that could be considered for the construction of new Veterans Hospital.

"This is giant step towards our dream of having a new hospital to serve our veteran community. For the first time the federal government has made a serious and exhaustive investigation on the real conditions of the existing facilities," the Resident Commissioner told representatives of 11 veteran organizations during a meeting in Fort Buchanan. The current conditions of the Veterans Hospital have been a major concern among the more

than 200,000 veterans living in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. The four options included in the report are:

- Construction of a new hospital in the existing location.
- Improving and remodeling of the existing hospital to be financed with federal grants.
- Leasing of a new facility near the present location, which would be developed by a private entity and managed by a private hospital or school of medicine.
- Construction of a new hospital in a new location which would be developed through a private-public partnership on land owned by the Government of Puerto Rico and/or a municipal government.

## Fortuños Announces the End of a Construction Moratorium in Fort Buchanan

After the Senate approved an amendment presented by Senator Mel Martínez (FL), the Resident Commissioner announced the end of the construction moratorium in Fort Buchanan imposed by Congress in 2000 when the Navy left Vieques.

This decision will help promote investment, growth and improved facilities and services for veterans and military men and women on the Island.

Among the construction projects that were pre-approved for Fort Buchanan, but were cancelled when the moratorium went into effect in 2000 are:

- A permanent gas station.
- A new security and emergency building.
- Improvement to the family housing area.
- A military data processing station.



Resident Commissioner, Luis Fortuño, and Buchanan's commander, Colonel Edwin C. Domingo, discuss the construction ban imposed by Congress and the ongoing efforts to eliminate it.



## 3B STATUS

# P.R. Status Discussion Active in the Federal Government

Natural Resources Committee approved H.R. 900, while the Presidential Committee on Status holds hearings in Washington

The status issue and the Serrano-Fortuño bill got lots of attention from legislative and executive branches. On Tuesday, October 23, the House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee voted on H.R. 900, by Congressmen José Serrano (NY) and Luis Fortuño. The piece, which has the support of 130 members of Congress was approved by the Committee, while the Presidential Committee on Status held hearings to discuss the progress and the recommendations on a report issued by the group two years ago.

The Resident Commissioner commemorated the Committee's diligence to approve the bill and once again stressed "that this shows how important the issue of Puerto Rico's status is in Congress." During the past three years the House of Representatives has held three hearings, while the federal Senate has held one.

In September, U.S. Senators, Ken Salazar (CO) and Mel Martínez (FL) submitted a bill in the Senate to authorize a plebiscite for Puerto Rico, no later than September 2009 and in which voters would choose among the current status, statehood, independence and free-association. About this measure, the Resident Commissioner explained "the project is the result of the serious discussions about status taking place in the Senate."

The original co-authors of H.R. 900 include : Nick Rahall (WV), and Don Young (AL) , President and Minority Leader of the Committee of Natural Resources; Steny Hoyer (MD) and Roy Blunt (MO), Majority Leader and Minority Spokesman in the House of Representatives; and Eric Cantor, Alternate Minority Spokesperson. The Resident Commissioner thanked his peers in the House and the Senate for their commitment with this legislation, which is "the most effective vehicle facilitate the four million Puerto Ricans living on the Island their right to self-determination.



## 4A ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### Fortuño Supports Local Farmers

He met with them to find effective solutions to the farmers concerns and problems including the future of Farm Services Agency (FSA) and the presence of the Coffee Berry Borer



Conscious about economic importance of agriculture in the Island's economy and the difficulties it faces, the Resident Commissioner met with a group of farmers in Adjuntas and Lares. The purpose of the meetings was to discuss the concerns and challenges that the industry is currently facing, so that together they can find feasible solutions that promote the industry's growth and prosperity.

During the meetings the farmers expressed their concerns about the proposed FSA Consolidation Plan, which proposes the closing and consolidation of three FSA offices in Adjuntas, Lares and Barranquitas. This would have a negative impact on the farmers ability to receive financial aid through loans, as well as disaster relief and emergency programs.

Fortuño clearly told farmers that he was against the proposed FSA plan and in a letter to Teresa Lasseter, FSA Administrator, he requested the immediate cancellation of the consolidation plan because it would interrupt the agency's services in Puerto Rico and cause costly

inconveniences to the island's constituents. In the letter the Resident Commissioner also stated that neither the FSA, nor the farmers would receive any benefits from the proposed plan. As part of his campaign against the plan, the Resident Commissioners became co-sponsor of Bill HR 1649 to prohibit the closing or relocation of any FSA office within the first year after approving the Agriculture Bill.

During the meetings the Resident Commissioner also expressed his concern about the Coffee Berry Borer, a plague that has created havoc among Puerto Rican coffee growers. He promised coffee farmers that he would work with the Agriculture Research Service at the Federal Department of Agriculture to identify resources to educate coffee growers about the plague and help farmers to continue producing the world's finest coffee. As part of his plan to help coffee growers Fortuño invited Mike Johanns, Agriculture Secretary, to visit local coffee plantations, as other farms on the Islands.

## 4B INFRASTRUCTURE

### Congress Awards Millions of Dollars for Flood Control Projects

Puerto Rico will receive \$46.5 million in federal funds for the construction of two flood control projects in Puerto Rico, thanks to the efforts of the Resident Commissioner in the U.S. Congress.

The House of Representatives approved the generous grant in July as part of the 2008 Grant Program for Energy and Water Projects. Of the total grant \$35 million will be invested in the Portugués River dam, while the remaining \$11.5 million will go to a flood control project in the Puerto Nuevo River in the San Juan metropolitan area.

The Portugués River grant will be used to complete the dam's design and begin its construction. The U.S. Corps of Engineers, which will be in charge of the project, estimates that construction works could last about five years and total costs could reach \$247 million, of which the local government will contribute \$64 million.

Meanwhile, the Puerto Nuevo River grant will help

control once and for all the flooding problem in the high traffic area, which for many years has affected businesses and residents in the sector. The federal award will also allow the local government to continue construction of the bridge over the de Diego Expressway near Plaza Las Américas.

During his time in Congress, Fortuño has obtained more than \$80 in federal funds for these two projects. During fiscal years 2006 and 2007 he secured \$16 million for the Portugués and Bucaná Rivers; and \$20 million to canalize the Puerto Nuevo River.

In addition, the Resident Commissioner obtained authorization for a \$150 million grant to canalize the Caño Martín Peña, under the Water Resources Development Act, and for a \$35 million grant to improve the infrastructure of the Water and Sewers Authority throughout the Island.



Resident Commissioner, Luis Fortuño, inspects the Caño Martín Peña with area residents and community leaders to discuss the federal grants obtained for aqueduct infrastructure works, including dredging of the channel.

**The Portugués, Bucaná and Puerto Nuevo Rivers and the Caño Martín Peña are among the beneficiaries**



## 5A COMMUNITY INITIATIVES [CONTINUES FROM COVER]



**Resident Commissioner emphasized the importance of the third sector which "is more and better prepared than the government to help communities in need"**

less, drug addicts, HIV/AIDS patients and others.

During his presentation, the Resident Commissioner emphasized the importance of the third sector which "is more and better prepared than the government to help communities in need." Fortuño called these organizations motors of change and of social justice for Puerto Rico.

With this in mind, the Resident Commissioner with the help of mayors, has been able to open 43 municipal Community and Faith Based Offices. These offices want to empower and strengthen community organizations by working together with the municipal governments to serve the needs of the communities.

There are more than 4,000 non-profit organizations in Puerto Rico, according to a study by Estudios Técnicos in 2002. In 2000 these organizations contributed over \$2,000 million to Puerto Rico's Gross National Product and created more than 100,000 jobs, which surpasses the number of jobs created by Tourism and Agriculture that year. During 2000 more than 500,000 people benefited from the services of these organizations.

As a loyal advocate of the interests of the third sector in Puerto Rico, the Resident Commissioner promotes the creation of strategic partnerships and coalitions that allow organizations to obtain additional federal funds, which are not currently available to them. "When we create partnerships we unite resources, avoid multiplicity of efforts and become closer to the communities," he said, while emphasizing that the positive impact multiplies when the private, public and third sector coordinate their efforts.

Every year the federal government transfers to Puerto Rico millions of dollars to reach its goals of empowering communities and rescue people through the efforts of community and faith based organizations.

## 5B SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



### Fortuño Files a Bill to Guarantee the Operations of the Arecibo Radio Telescope

In view of the value it has for scientists, engineers and the people of Puerto Rico, the Resident Commissioner, filed a bill in the U.S. Congress to guarantee the operations of the Arecibo Observatory. The Arecibo facility, which is the world's largest Radio Telescope, has been a key instrument in some of the most important discoveries of modern astronomy, including the first planet outside our solar system and the first Binary Pulsar, which won a Nobel Prize.

For the scientific community the Arecibo Observatory is essential in the study of the ionosphere; as well as asteroids and comets that come near the Earth. In fact, the Arecibo facility has unique abilities in the world that enable the study of asteroids that come near the Earth, which pose a potential danger.

The Arecibo Observatory receives more than 120,000 visitors every year. Its design and works are famous world wide, especially among engineers who consider the facility as one of the worlds marvels.

The Resident Commissioner's Bill, which was discussed in public hearings on October 11 held by the Science and Aeronautic Sub Committee, was sponsored by 10 members of Congress, including Dana Rohrabacher (CA) and Charles Rangel (NY). This Bill will help raise awareness about the need importance guaranteeing the funds for the Arecibo Observatory to continue working and making valuable contributions to science.

## COMMITMENT WITH HIS CONSTITUENCY

### More benefits for over 20,000 Federal Employees on the Island

A bill to increase by 5% the earnings of bilingual federal employees was filed in the U.S. Congress by the Resident Commissioner and Michael Honda, a congressman from California. The document, which was filed in October, proposes a raise to recognize for the first time the value of thousands of federal employees, who are required to be fluent in a second language other than English.

The bill suggests a 5% raise in salary for those employees who show fluency in two languages, including English, and are required to use it as part of their official functions. If passed, the law will require federal agencies to establish a procedure to certify that a person is fluent in a second language other than English.

#### MORE COLA FOR FEDERAL EMPLOYEES ON THE ISLAND

Federal employees in Puerto Rico, which total more than 20,000, could

receive a 3% raise in the Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) thanks to Fortuño's efforts to guarantee the benefit. The increase from 10% to 13% could become effective in March 2008.

Last July, the Resident Commissioner stated his opposition to a bill presented by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), which proposed replacing the COLA for a "local payment" to federal employees on the Island. Under the proposed "local payment" the earnings of federal employees in Puerto Rico would have been reduced.

The 3% increase now proposed by OPM takes into consideration the increase in the cost of living in Puerto Rico caused by the recently imposed sales taxes of 7%. The future of the COLA benefit in Puerto Rico was discussed in a meeting held on August 28, 2007 with the participation of more than 100 federal employees and OPM representatives.



## 6A LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY [CONTINUES FROM COVER]



Resident Commissioner, Luis Fortuño, attends the official ceremony to rename the Caribbean National Forest as the El Yunque National Forest

projects in Puerto Nuevo, Ponce and Fajardo; dredging of the San Juan Bay; and canalization of the Rio Grande River in Arecibo.

- \$150 million for canalization of the Caño Martín Peña and \$35 million to improve AAA's aqueduct and sewer systems throughout the Island.

### ✓ VETERANS AFFAIRS

- Attained permanency of Fort Buchanan in Puerto Rico.
- Put an end to the construction moratorium in Fort Buchanan enabling the improvement and expansion of the existing facilities.
- Approval of the legislative language that ordered evaluation of the current situation of the Veterans Hospital and recommend an action plan for the construction of a new facility. As a result, the Veterans Affairs Administration released a study detailing four viable options for a new hospital.

### ✓ HEALTH

- Obtained a \$500 increase per student in the Pell Grant Scholarship Funds and the extension of the benefits to 5,800 more students.
- Addition of English classes in WIA training programs.
- Promoted reading skills and reading among special education students during the book fairs "Read to Grow".

### ✓ EDUCATION

- Approval of a \$500 increase per student in Pell Grant funds and expansion of the benefits to 5,800 additional students.
- Inclusion of an English class in the occupational development programs of WIA.
- Promoted reading and pre-reading skills among special education students through the book fairs "Read to Grow".

### ✓ COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- Opening of 48 municipal Community and Faith Based Initiatives Offices to empower community and faith based organizations and promote the creation of strategic partnerships with the public and private sectors to help communities in need.
- Presented legislation in Congress to strengthen community organizations giving health and support services to HIV/AIDS patients.
- Offered workshops to empower and educate non-profit organizations about available federal funds.

### ✓ STATUS

- Approval of HR 900, better known as the Serrano-Fortuño bill, in the Natural Resources Committee of the House of Representatives. The bill has the support of 130 members of Congress.
- Presentation of a self-determination bill for Puerto Rico in the U.S. Senate by Senators Mel Martínez (FL) and Ken Salazar (CO).
- Follow-up hearings by the White House Interagency Group to discuss the report issued two years ago.
- For the first time in 10 years, both legislative bodies in Washington held hearings to discuss the status of Puerto Rico during the same session.

### ✓ ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

- Attained protection of one third of the El Yunque Forest Reserve, which will be dedicated to wild life
- Approval of federal funds to construct an aviary in El Yunque and protect the El Karso Region.

## ① INFONOTES

### Fortuño Gets Over \$4 million for Improvement in Old San Juan

Recently, the Resident Commissioner joined representatives from the National Park Service to inaugurate the new trolley system to take visitors to the San Cristóbal and El Morro Castles. During the past few years Fortuño has obtained more than \$4 million in federal funds to improve the infrastructure in Old San Juan,

Puerto Rico's leading tourist attraction. The federal grants include \$640 million to purchase new trolleys and fix the access road to El Morro; \$1.02 million to remodel the aqueduct system at the San Cristóbal Castle and the bathrooms in El Morro; and \$3 million to replace the street's cobblestones in the Old City.

IN THE PHOTO: Resident Commissioner, Luis Fortuño, participates during the inauguration of the new trolley service to connect the San Cristóbal and El Morro forts.



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